Blue Rainbow Katydid (*Vestria* sp.)

By Curtis Lakin

Background

The species is a new Orthopteran to culture it became available in 2011. This bush cricket (Tettigoniidae) belongs to the subfamily Copiphorinae a predatory group which include the colourful Rainbow or Crayola katydids. The genus *Vestria* is found in various habitats including tropical rainforests of South America. This species heralds from the Andean mountain slopes of Ecuador.

Description and Life History

A medium sized species which is extremely attractive, both sexes having bright blue bodies with yellow stripes, dark blue head and legs, with blue grey wings and reaching a body length of up to 40mm. It is largely nocturnal and lives and feeds at the edge of forests where it patrols trees and shrubs. A short shrill song has been observed in captivity and males call females by drumming their abdomen against the branch they are resting on. This is a largely predatory bush cricket which hunts other insects. Nymphs hatch from eggs after about 4 months, in groups of 12-40 and are translucent green on hatching and about 4 mm long. They disperse to lead a solitary existence and take about 4-6 months to mature. During this time they become progressively more colourful developing red black and blue colouration to the mouthparts and head with bright purple on the underside of the abdomen. Adults take on the predominantly blue colouration and live for 6 months to 12 months.

Culture Instructions

This species is more challenging to keep than some of the vegetarian katydids. Some cannibalism is demonstrated by the nymphs and unless a few losses can be tolerated treat the nymphs like mantids and house them up separately and keep them at temperatures from room temp (15°C) to very warm (30°C). Humidity with reasonable ventilation is important at all times. Damp moss at the base of the pot and a perforated lid work well. The nymphs will bite through netting when larger so avoid this as a means of covering the pot in later instars. Feeding is straight forward as the nymphs and adults will take all manner of invertebrate prey including mealworms caterpillars, spiders, greenfly, waxworms, crickets, roaches, etc. They will also eat fruit, flower heads (especially dandelion and other Compositae) as well as dried proteinaceous material such as tropical fish flake and other fish foods such as bloodworm and tubifex. Once mature, adults can be kept together communally without risk of cannibalism provided that they are well fed.

Matings happens regularly and egg laying occurs in holes around rotting tree stumps Florists oasis packed around with wet moss or rotten wood/soil mix provides for a suitable alternative. Eggs are laid in batches and best incubated in situ. A humid but ventilated environment must be maintained.